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A literature review analysis of the Turkish scholars' research articles in ELT and applied linguistics

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore the rhetorical organization and potential problems of the literature review sections of the research articles published by Turkish scholars in the field of English language teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics. Employing content analysis, the study analyzed 100 research articles published. To analyze the articles, a rubric was prepared on the basis of relevant literature. The findings of the study showed that appropriate paraphrasing lacks and critical evaluation is not adequately placed in citation preferences of the investigated articles.

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1. Introduction

Academic writers are sought to integrate ideas of others into their texts within formally determined conventions and norms. Thus, citation is a significant component of academic writing. It enables writers to effectively develop their arguments and thus establish their voice and credibility within the text. Citation can be viewed as 'attribution of propositional content to another source' (Hyland 2002, p. 115) and 'central to social context of persuasion' (Hyland 1999, p. 342).

In accordance with the importance of citation use in academic texts, research has shown that accurate and appropriate employment of others' sources displays considerable difficulties and challenges for academic writers both native and non-native English speakers. Most of the research into L2 students' writing from sources has focused on problems such as plagiarism, over-citing, and inadequate paraphrasing (e.g., Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006; Angélil-Carter, 2000; Borg, 2000; Campbell, 1990; Pecorari, 2003, 2006; Shi, 2004, 2010).

In their comparative study, Mansourizadeh and Ahmad (2011) found that novice and expert writers used citations for various purposes. While novice writers used citations to attribute content to the source, the expert writers used

them to provide support and justification for their arguments. Another comparative study was Barton's (1993) which based on discourse analysis of the writings of experienced and inexperienced writers. According to Barton, inexperienced writers' texts were essays rather than professional papers.

Understanding the ideas of other authors that they read and being able to command language, while writing in a way that sounds academic appears to be inadequate and they often choose to copy the words of other authors that have just read (Correa, 2008). There are a number of factors for inappropriate use of source text and citation violations, they are cultural differences in use of sources (Pennycook, 1996; Chandrasoma, Thompson, & Pennycook, 2004), language proficiency (Johns & Mayes, 1990; Currie, 1998; Shi, 2004), and the context and purpose of the writing task (Campbell, 1990; Currie, 1998; Barks & Watts, 2001; Chandrasoma et al., 2004; Shi, 2004).

While investigating citation practices in academic writing, corpus-based research is also common (Ramoroka, 2014; Hyland, 2002; Thomas and Hawes, 1994; Hewings, Lillis & Vladimirou, 2010). Ramoroka (2014) conducted a research based on a corpus of 80.000 words from essays of university students. The findings of the study showed that informing verbs were used more frequently than argumentative ones.

Some studies on citation practices have focused on several typologies (White, 2004; Petric, 2007; Azlan, 2013). These typological studies have led the notion of effective citation strategies for especially graduate students. In his elaborate review on the concept of citation, for instance, Lee (2013) proposes a 'citation basics class' for the systematic instruction of the art of citation. Samraj (2013) has investigated form and function of citations in discussion sections of master's theses and research articles. She conducted genre analysis and specialist informant interviews in order to explore the forms of citations and their rhetorical functions.

Research underlines that practice of citation and the appropriate and acceptable employment of this notion in writing should receive extra attention (Bloch, & Chi, 1995; Dong, 1996; White, 2004; Petric, 2007). Citation practices of student writing appear to be a scarce area of research to be paid extra attention. It is impossible to claim that lack of knowledge and analytic ability can be replaced by effective use of citation but it can assist to meet these needs in academic writer's academic achievement.

It is obvious that citation tendencies of scholars have been and will be of great interest for comparative research as well as corpus-based studies and proposed citation training models. All these attempts are expected to broaden and deepen the understanding of citation as part of scientific research papers.

2. Material and Method

Content analysis was used to explore the citation employment in 100 published research articles written by Turkish authors. These articles were randomly selected from national and international journals. A rubric was prepared by the research team on the light of relevant literature. Rubric investigated the following sections:

- *Types of content (method, objective, result, argument, definition)*
- *Location of source (abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, discussion, conclusion implication)*
- *Type of transformation (direct quotation, patch-writing, paraphrasing critical evaluation)*

To provide inter-evaluator reliability, two researchers in the team simultaneously analyzed the citations. The main criterion was to be able to reach the source of the cited expression or sentence. In order to answer the above sections' questions, each cited source was found and evaluated. In case, any source of the cited expression was not accessible, then this citation excluded from the analysis. When two options were thought to be used for one option, then by means of discussing the most appropriate option, research team filled in options.

3. Results

Table 1. Distributions of Citations in the Analyzed Articles by Three Main Characteristics

| Type of Content | f | % | Location of Source | f | % | Type of Transformation | f | % |
|-----------------|-------------|------|--------------------|-------------|------|------------------------|-------------|------|
| Method | 56 | 4.1 | Abstract | 4 | 0.2 | Direct quotation | 308 | 22.9 |
| Objective | 88 | 6.5 | Introduction | 719 | 53.5 | Patch writing | 439 | 32.6 |
| Result | 332 | 24.7 | Literature Review | 310 | 23 | Paraphrase | 443 | 32.9 |
| Argu. / Disc. | 739 | 55 | Methodology | 60 | 4.4 | Critical evaluation | 153 | 11.3 |
| Definition | 128 | 9.5 | Discussion | 88 | 13.9 | | | |
| | | | Conc. / Impl. | 62 | 4.6 | | | |
| Total | 1343 | | | 1343 | | | 1343 | |

Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of the given characteristics – *content*, *location*, and *transformation* – in the analyzed articles. As can be seen, citations are made mostly for *Argument/Discussion* (% 55). They are also used frequently for commenting on the results of the study (% 24.7) and as providing definitions (% 9.5). These citations, however, are located in the introductory parts most (%53.5) and in the abstracts of the studies least (% 0.2). Also, according to the table, the types of transformation most frequently employed are *paraphrase* (% 32.9) and *patch writing* (% 32.6). Critical evaluation, on the other hand, is the least (% 11.3) preferred type to transform the citations in the analyzed articles.

Table 2. Types of Content according to the Location of Source

| | Method | Objective | Result | Argu./ Disc. | Definition | TOTAL |
|--------------------------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------------|------------|-------|
| Abstract | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Introduction | 19 | 66 | 150 | 414 | 70 | 719 |
| Literature Review | 3 | 16 | 93 | 154 | 44 | 310 |
| Methodology | 28 | 0 | 7 | 21 | 4 | 60 |
| Discussion | 6 | 4 | 62 | 110 | 6 | 188 |
| Conc. / Impl. | 0 | 2 | 18 | 39 | 3 | 62 |
| TOTAL | 56 | 88 | 332 | 739 | 128 | 1.343 |

Table 2 shows the types of content employed in different sections of the articles. As can be seen, except for the sections of abstract and methodology, two types of content – *Argument/Discussion* and *Results*- are the most common types in each section. In the abstracts, where the citations are least employed, the types are varied and in the methodology section, *Method* is the main content of citations although “Argument/Discussion” is also common.

Table 3.Type of Transformation according to the Type of Content and Location of Source

| Type of Transformation | Type of Content | | | | | Location of source | | | | | | | TOTAL |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------|--------|---------------|------------|--------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|---------------|-------|
| | Method | Objective | Result | Argu. / Disc. | Definition | TOTAL | Abstract | Introduction | Literature Review | Methodology | Discussion | Conc. / Impl. | |
| Direct Quotation | 12 | 5 | 30 | 182 | 79 | 308 | 1 | 161 | 73 | 14 | 51 | 8 | 308 |
| Patch Writing | 16 | 54 | 131 | 214 | 24 | 439 | 1 | 256 | 102 | 16 | 46 | 18 | 439 |
| Paraphrase | 27 | 25 | 125 | 245 | 21 | 443 | 1 | 252 | 87 | 25 | 61 | 17 | 443 |
| Critical Evaluation | 1 | 4 | 45 | 100 | 3 | 153 | 1 | 56 | 43 | 6 | 29 | 18 | 153 |
| TOTAL | 56 | 88 | 332 | 739 | 128 | 1343 | 4 | 719 | 310 | 60 | 188 | 62 | 1343 |

Table 3 shows how the type of transformation varies according to the types of content and location of source. As can be seen, *Paraphrase* and *Patch writing* are the most common types of transformation in the analyzed articles and they are employed mostly for *Argument/ Discussion*. The other type, *Direct Quotation*, is also very common for *Argument/ Discussion*. However, this type of transformation is the most preferred type for *Definition*. As the location of source, *Introduction* is the most common section among others and it is followed by *Literature Review* section. This order is also valid for *Critical Evaluation* which is the least employed type among the four types of transformation.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Academic writing norms and conventions require writers to employ certain usages such as citing other sources and to cite them appropriately. Relevant corpus studies both contribute to understanding the current writing tendencies and guiding authors seeking to write better. In terms of content of citations employed by the Turkish writers, the prominent purpose attracts attention in favor of argument and discussion. In fact, this content is not often confronted particularly novice writers' texts, in contrast many authors appear to basically cite referring to previous research and findings. Location of the citations is brought around introductions in Turkish authors' articles. Subsequent to literature review sections discussions often include citations. This citing tendency seems to be parallel with the writing conventions in ELT. The heart of the current study centers around types of citations which is in fact the most problematic aspect of citing all over academic world. While attempting to paraphrase other sources, many writers fall into the stake of patch writing. As the research team reached the original sources they analyzed if the paraphrasing was achieved. Basically changing some words or substituting them encompasses nearly half of the citations. Even though Turkish authors mostly employed citations to discuss and center around arguments, they partly fail appropriately transform knowledge of others. This is not unique to Turkish authors but is a gradually increasing problem for whole academia. Only 32 percent of the cited sources appear to be appropriately paraphrased according to writing conventions and norms. Another significant finding highlights the lack of critical evaluation. Academic writing sources often underline importance of critical evaluation while using other sources rather than merely transferring knowledge. The core of the literature review sections are recommended to create on the basis of knowledge transforming. However, the least type of citation in published articles includes critical evaluation (%11.3). This is most likely due to lack academic literacy awareness, in that writers are not equipped with academic writing conventions and norms including plagiarism without taking explicit instructions and institutional writing assistance. As English uninterruptedly expands as the leading language for dissemination of knowledge, the question of writing effectively and in expected ways causes considerable challenges to writers, particularly novice writers and graduate students who are required to learn and to master to succeed in the academia. Therefore, how to use others' sources in formal texts writers should be provided by means of explicit instructions and concrete practices to the writers.

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